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TITLE: The Catholic Church Responds to AIDS: Models of HIV Prevention Programs

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ISSUE: The Catholic Church comprises a major portion of the U.S. religious community with a reported membership of over 60 million people. Because of its well-organized infrastructure, its ability to reach thousands of persons, including vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, the Catholic community is a valued and effective partner in HIV prevention and AIDS services.

SETTING: Three models of HIV prevention programs developed and implemented for and by Catholic agencies and those who they serve will be discussed. These include: (1) Training, technical assistance and information dissemination programs to Catholic Charities administrators and service providers throughout the U.S.; (2) Parish-based HIV education, outreach, and training programs to parish leaders throughout the U.S.; and (3) AIDS Face-to-Face HIV prevention workshop series targeting youth in San Francisco Catholic schools.

PROJECT: (1) A partnership project between the University of Texas School of Public Health and Catholic Charities USA (UT/CCUSA), established since 1995 to increase the capacity of CCUSA's 1400 local service agencies to deliver crucial effective HIV prevention information. The project provides: (a) broad dissemination of HIV prevention materials and information to 1400 local CCUSA agencies; (b) technical assistance and staff training to expand and strengthen the existing HIV prevention services; and (c) technical assistance and staff training to initiate HIV prevention programs. (2) A parish-based HIV education program developed and implemented by the National Catholic AIDS Network (NCAN) and CCUSA to: (a) study over 50 parish education and service programs throughout the U.S. to design a training manual and program to expand HIV prevention and outreach efforts; and (b) to train parish leaders to respond with cultural sensitivity and invite participation from and response to all people regardless of their ethnicity. (3) HIV prevention workshops targeting youth in Catholic schools in San Francisco to: (a) utilize evaluation results to influence attitudes and beliefs of students at risk of HIV infection; and (b) teach youth negotiation skills, while also being sensitive to the teachings of the Church.

RESULTS: Higher visibility of HIV/AIDS prevention as a 'front burner' priority by Catholic organizations, the establishment of HIV response teams and mechanisms, increased awareness and interest in the Catholic response to HIV by Catholic decision makers, development of training materials which responds to specific needs of the Catholic Church, and capacity building among Catholic agencies.

LESSONS LEARNED: Similar to other organizations which are responding to HIV/AIDS, when given adequate preparation, training and information, the Catholic Church is capable of delivering effective HIV prevention and AIDS services programs not only to Catholic people but to the community at large.

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